

Reporting poverty in the UK

A practical guide for journalists

Revised edition 2009



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About the Society of Editors

The Society of Editors has more than 400 members in national, regional and local newspapers and magazines and broadcasting, new media, journalism education and media law. It campaigns for media freedom, self-regulation, the public's right to know and the maintenance of standards in journalism.

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About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is a leading funder of social research and development work in the UK. It works with the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust to provide evidence, solutions and ideas that will help to overcome the causes of poverty, disadvantage and social evil.

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Contents

Foreword	5
Introduction	6
The final stigma in 21st-century Britain – David Seymour	7
1 Poverty in the UK	11
• Measuring poverty	16
• Not just income	19
• The cost of poverty	19
• What is poverty actually like?	20
• Poverty among working people	23
• Location of poverty	28
<i>Panels</i>	
– Coping on a low income: Denise’s story	20
– The mythology of poverty	24
2 The media and poverty	29
• Heroes, villains and victims	32
• The knowledge gap	35
• Links to other issues	38
<i>Panel</i>	
– People in poverty: how they view media coverage	36

3 The reporting challenge	39
• Practical approaches	43
• Tackling stereotypes and prejudice	46
<i>Panel</i>	
– Words and images	51
4 Telling the story: how journalists see it	55
• ‘Deserving’ vs ‘undeserving’ – Ros Wynne-Jones	57
• The story of the Farepak savers – Huw Williams	59
• Problems in reporting poverty – Neil Mackay	60
• Child poverty: filming Ewan – Rachel Hellings	65
• <i>The Wrong Trainers</i> – Kez Margrie	67
5 Sources and resources	71
• Definitions	73
• Poverty and associated problems	75
• Policy on poverty	78
• Web sources of information	80
• Reporting standards and codes of conduct	81
• Contacts	82
References	87

Foreword

This booklet is not a political pamphlet. It is precisely what it says on the cover – a practical guide to reporting an issue that is either not reported at all or is hidden by the fog of the debate that it aims to demystify.

When the latest pictures arrive of pestilence, natural disaster, disease or famine, the media responds with immediacy and sensitivity and cash flows in to charities. It is more difficult to convey the long-running, grinding disadvantage experienced by people who may not be living quite so obviously in poverty and despair in the UK. Indeed, there is a view that we should find a different, more appropriate, word to describe what is a relative term.

Issues such as poverty are frequently discussed in bland phrases or camouflaged by academic jargon. The fact is they concern people – our potential audiences of readers, listeners, viewers, internet users and even twitterers. It would be wrong both ethically and commercially not to do them the service of reporting their lives as sensitively as we would any other members of our communities.

The Society of Editors wants journalists to understand the facts and report them fairly and accurately. The Media Trust wants charities and other agencies to make best use of media. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has generously provided the funds to help us provide this aid to both our efforts.

Our thanks go to those charities, communities, journalists and editors who joined our workshops to help inform this guide. And we are indebted to David Seymour, a journalist of immense skill and wide experience, for attempting to unravel some of the mystery.

Bob Satchwell
Executive Director, Society of Editors

Caroline Diehl
Chief Executive, The Media Trust

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide journalists with an overview of UK poverty, to highlight the dilemmas faced, suggest ways in which it can be covered including how some journalists have tackled it, and to provide an informative, useful tool for all who work in the various sections of the media – print, broadcasting and online.

It has been developed with input from a range of groups dealing with poverty issues and a series of seminars involving journalists from newspapers, television and radio at national, regional and local levels, as well as experts on the issue and people experiencing poverty. Quotes and useful advice emanating from these events have been included. The guide also draws on research by Glasgow Caledonian University on media coverage published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in September 2008.

We hope the information will prove useful to those writing about poverty, whether on a regular or much less frequent basis, to help them ensure their reports are accurate and provide a real insight into the issues involved.

This 2009 edition of the guide includes updated statistics, but please note that figures are constantly changing. Look in the ‘Sources and resources’ section at the back of the guide for pointers to the most recent information.

The final stigma in 21st-century Britain

By David Seymour

Why is it so difficult to report on poverty? After all, the media is regularly accused of an obsession with most aspects of money. So what makes having very little of it so much less of a story than having lots?

The *Sunday Times* Rich List has become almost as anticipated an annual event as Christmas. There is a fascination with the financial excesses of footballers, City fat cats and lottery winners. And we are gripped by stories of the wealthy who fall from grace, or have lost a quarter of their fortune in the recession.

But apart from occasionally reporting on pensioners struggling to make ends meet, the P-word is rarely used. Yet poverty has been a cornerstone of Gordon Brown's policies and his abolition of the 10p tax rate in 2008 managed to unite the entire media, as well as politicians, in condemning an attack on the poorest in society.

Even that huge story wasn't really discussed in terms of poverty, though – it became a political saga about the Prime Minister's troubles in which the crisis facing the worse-off households in the country was largely a by-product.

Yet in the UK today, millions of our fellow citizens live in poverty. Not the ragged destitution symbolised by Dickens' bedraggled urchins or humbled old folk condemned to spend their final days in the workhouse. Certainly not the horror of starvation and early death ravaging parts of Africa.

But at the start of the 21st century, poverty continues to be widespread in the United Kingdom, one of the richest countries in the world. Only a handful of poverty-deniers insist the poor are no longer among us. Yet, even though there are many times more

people in poverty than play for Premiership football clubs or quaff £100 bottles of champagne in exotic nightclubs, there is no comparison with the amount of column inches or airtime devoted to them. And when journalists do deal with poverty, too often the result is negative, with little or no attempt to understand or explain what life is like for those on the bottom rung of the economic ladder.

There can be a sense of incredulity when we stumble into the world of poverty. Look at the coverage when the media hordes descended on the estate where Shannon Matthews lived before she was kidnapped in February 2008. Reporters could not have been more amazed if they had been parachuted into the jungle home of a long-lost tribe rather than simply driven up the motorway to Dewsbury.

Yet poverty and its effects are relevant to a significant proportion of the stories which dominate the daily news agenda. People in poverty tend to be less healthy than the rest of the population. They may well smoke and drink more. Wouldn't you if your life seemed hopeless and unfulfilling? Their children are likely to do worse at school, leading to involvement in crime and drugs. Poverty can be involved in immigration and attitudes to it, and to housing problems. It is certainly part of most of the big social issues.

It is not the job of the media generally to solve the problem of poverty or to take sides in the political tussle over it. We are not a social service. But the cost of poverty to the country – and hence to our readers, viewers and listeners – is enormous. By explaining it, we may make the public more understanding and aware. That, in turn, could lead to politicians being encouraged to take decisions which would make life better for everyone.

Part of our job as journalists is to untangle the complicated, whether we are a City editor explaining the convolutions of international finance or a reporter piecing together scraps of information about a crime. On the whole, we can be proud of how well we do it. Yet almost no effort is made to explain poverty, its causes, effects and consequences. That is what this guide is about.

The British people are somewhat ambivalent in their attitudes to poverty. A poll in 2006 showed that 58 per cent of the country thinks there is “quite a lot” of it in the UK. But, as anyone who has listened to a radio phone-in or scanned some of the readers' letters pages knows, there is a widespread refusal to accept that so many people really are poor.

That is at least partly due to those in poverty being understandably unwilling to publicise their situation. Even in an age when people will talk about being gay or a single parent, you don't find anyone proclaiming to the world that they are poor. Poverty is the last stigma.

The British are remarkably effective in disguising their poverty. Here are a couple of examples given to me by journalists from stories they covered:

- a mother who lived on virtually nothing but bread so her children could eat well and have a few little luxuries;
- a children's bedroom with the latest electronic games, so the kids didn't feel ashamed at school, but with a mattress on the floor being the only piece of furniture.

Poverty is not simply about not having enough money or going without luxuries. It is about struggling to get through each day. About constantly making sacrifices. About living in a state of worry verging on perpetual fear. About never knowing how you will survive the week. About never having a few days away, let alone a holiday.

It is about your children being haunted by the prospect of being stigmatised, humiliated and bullied. About pensioners not knowing how they can carry on living yet dreading imposing a burden on relatives when they die.

Of course there are a few people whose fecklessness is responsible for the paucity of their existence. But most of those in poverty cannot help being in their situation. No one chooses to be poor.

We hear a lot about the scandal of living in a society with high crime rates, inadequate health care, growing violence and uncontrollable children. But is there really any greater scandal than accepting that so many of our fellow citizens are condemned to live in poverty?

Before things can get better, there needs to be a more general recognition of what poverty is in our country today. Journalists can help with that. But first, we have to understand it ourselves.

Chapter 1

Poverty in the UK



“... the media is important in informing people who are not poor about poverty... to bring the reality of poverty into people’s houses”

It is easy to believe that poverty only affects a small number of people. And that it involves an easily-identified underclass found in a few pockets of ghetto-like deprivation.

In fact, the number of people who officially experience poverty is quite startling. Figures from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) suggest that about three in five British households experienced income poverty for at least one year during the period 1991–2004.¹

Yet when we talk about poverty in the UK today we rarely mean malnutrition or the levels of squalor of previous centuries or even the hardships of the 1930s before the advent of the welfare state. It is a relative concept. ‘Poor’ people are those who are considerably worse off than the majority of the population – a level of deprivation heavily out of line with the general living standards enjoyed by the majority of the population in one of the most affluent countries in the world.

Sunday Herald



Some people might think they don't look poor but, like any proud mother, she doesn't want her children or herself to appear to be in need.



Closure of amenities in deprived communities and transport difficulties in rural areas add to the daily challenges of living in poverty.

But how much worse off are ‘poor’ people? Poverty implies not being able to afford to buy things most people consider essential nowadays or to participate in activities which, similarly, are thought to be a minimum requirement of everyday life. Even though someone might have a sufficient income for basic food, clothing and rent, they may not be able to afford much else. They may be stuck in a rundown area, unable to move because they don’t have access to credit, let alone a comfortable income. The consequences are not purely financial. They may feel humiliated. They may be afraid to leave their home at night. Their children may become trapped in a cycle not just of poverty but of apparent failure and despair. They feel ignored – no one is listening to them; they have no voice.

Professor Peter Townsend, a leading authority on UK poverty, defines it as when someone’s *“resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities”*.

The European Commission in its Joint Report on Social Inclusion 2004 came up with something similar: *“People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantage through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.”*²

When it took office in 1997, the New Labour Government made tackling poverty a prime objective. Specifically, it pledged to eliminate child poverty by 2020, with an interim target to halve it by 2010. Since 1998 it has made billions of pounds available to families on low incomes, yet most observers, while welcoming the commitment, are sceptical that the interim target will be achieved. And it now appears that the Government accepts that it will not be reached by the date set.

Another ambition is to eliminate fuel poverty, an aim that has been made more important by soaring fuel prices.

“We all live in ‘ghettos’ – in our own world with people who are like us. So the media is important in informing people who are not poor about poverty... to bring the reality of poverty into people’s houses.”

Alex Tennant, Head of Policy and Research, Save the Children, Northern Ireland

Measuring poverty

Poverty can be defined and measured in various ways. The most commonly used approach is **relative income poverty**. Each household’s income, adjusted for family size, is compared to median income. (The median is the ‘middle’ income: half the population

Sunday Herald



A stark illustration that living in poverty can mean feeling trapped in a bleak existence.

have more than the median and half have less.) Those with less than 60 per cent of median income are classified as poor. This ‘poverty line’ is the agreed international measure used throughout the European Union.

Most researchers in the field, along with the UK Government, EU and politicians across different parties, accept this level to identify individuals and households as being significantly below the living standard acceptable to most people today. They use it to look at trends over time and differences between groups of people.

By this measure, in 2007–08:

- 23 per cent of the UK population was in poverty – 13.5 million people
- 31 per cent of children were in families in poverty – 4 million children
- 18 per cent of pensioners were in poverty – 2 million people

In 2007–08, a couple without children was considered to be poor if their weekly income after rent or mortgage was less than £199.

The weekly poverty line for a couple with two children was £322 and for a single pensioner, £115.

Since 1997, low incomes have risen. Much of the rise has been in line with rises in living standards generally. As a result, the numbers in relative poverty have fallen by only 4 per cent, from a level that was high by historic standards.

How the poverty line for different family types compares to the median income (pounds per week, after housing costs*)

	Median	60% median
Couple, no children	332	199
Single, no children	192	115
Couple with two children aged 5 and 14	537	322
Single with two children aged 5 and 14	398	239

Source: Department for Work and Pensions, Households Below Average Income, 2007/08 (taken from Table 2.3, page 18)

* It is worth noting that the Government usually gives income figures before housing costs have been deducted.

The 60 per cent median income measure on which these figures are based, though an international standard, is arbitrary in the sense that there is no exact calculation that this is a threshold of minimum income acceptable to society. However, to help interpret this poverty line, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has been calculating what income would be enough to allow families to enjoy a minimum socially acceptable standard of living. It has done this by asking ordinary people to discuss in detail what would need to go into a family budget. The publication of minimum income standards (from July 2008) provides a benchmark that will help journalists and others interpret the poverty figures.

Just as we have a concept of minimum educational standards, income standards show what we as a society are willing to accept as a minimum to give everyone an adequate standard of living that allows them to participate in society. They are grounded in research into what the public thinks, not just the judgements of experts.

Anna Karf/Save the Children



Run-down estates are often out of sight and out of mind for many people.

Deprivation is defined as being unable to afford specific essentials. Research shows that more than a million children live in families unable to buy them new clothes when they need them.

Not just income

Low income is just one indicator of poverty. A fuller picture looks at all resources, not only income. This can include access to decent housing, community amenities and social networks, and assets, i.e. what people own. Somebody who lacks these resources can be said to be in poverty in a wider sense.

In the UK, many people live in deprived communities, ones in which there are fewer jobs and people's resources and hopes are low. This concentration of poverty can bring additional disadvantages. The phrase 'social exclusion' is used to describe the multiple social problems – for example, poor health, alcohol and drug abuse, high rates of crime victimisation and perpetration, limited ambitions and expectations, and high rates of family breakdown and reformation – these are often associated with living in a seriously disadvantaged area.³

Another linked factor relates mainly to older people, who are described as 'asset rich-income poor'. Many people in this position own their homes. These may well now be bigger than they need and have a capital value. But many people in this situation have very small incomes and cannot afford the upkeep, resulting in deteriorating homes, which may well be losing value.

The cost of poverty

The cost to UK society of poverty and the many other social problems with which it is related is huge. While it is not easy to quantify all the consequences of poverty, here are some of the annual costs directly or indirectly connected to child poverty, as an example:⁴

- £3 billion spent on children by local authority services
- more than £500 million to support homeless families with children
- around £300 million on free school dinners

- around £500 million on primary health care for deprived children
- knock-on costs in lost taxes and extra benefits claimed by adults with poor job prospects, linked to educational failure at school.

What is poverty actually like?

The cold statistics do not readily convey how serious the situation can be for people experiencing poverty.

Difficult decisions have to be made on a daily basis. What will the family cut back on? Food? Heating? Clothes for the children? Repairing household items? Transport? Childcare costs? The family might have to leave out toiletries, school trips, holidays, birthday parties, insurance, days out, a TV licence or even meals.

Coping on a low income – Denise’s story

*The following story taken from **Women’s and children’s poverty: making the links (Women’s Budget Group, 2005)** may seem extreme, but it is just one true example of the daily complications and humiliations that people in poverty face today. Some of the terms on tax credits and benefits are, technically, not correct. Benefits, tax credits and payment methods change, but the underlying issue remains the same – how difficult it can be to cope.*

Denise is a single parent with two children. She’s not a lazy woman – she actually works 16 hours a week, and her Working Family Tax Credit is paid by BACS directly into her bank account. I just wanted to explain to you why this is a real concern to those women who are living on benefits.

Denise got up one Monday morning and both of her children needed some money to go to school, but Denise didn’t have any money. She has her benefit paid directly into her bank account, in which she had three pounds. There isn’t a cash point machine near to her home, and even if there was one, it may actually cost her £2 something, to actually access that £3 in the first place.

That’s if she was allowed to take £3 from a cash point, because, as we all know, in many machines you can’t get less than £20 out, never mind £10. There’s often a ceiling

Many people move in and out of poverty. Certain times can make people more vulnerable. For instance, when children go to school, there are associated expenses for families. The average cost of a school uniform and PE kit is £224.69 – the average local authority grant for school uniform is just £51.27⁵, if there is a grant at all. Another example is the often substantial drop in income when people move from employment to retirement.

“Emily misses out on a lot of things. I can’t take her swimming or to playgroups as I can’t afford it.”

Mother quoted in *It doesn’t happen here: the reality of child poverty in the UK* (page 18) by N. Sharma with D. Hirsch, published by Barnardo’s, 2007

on bank accounts as well, and if you don’t leave a minimum amount in that bank account – possibly £5, £10 – they actually close the account.

So there we have this mum, with her two children needing to go to school – they need some money, and she’s got £3, but she can’t get at it. She doesn’t have the bus fare to go and fetch it. So she rings her mum, who is a pensioner, and lives some 12 miles and 2 buses away and says – can you help me mum? Can you get over here, and lend me a pound to get into Birmingham so I can get my £3 out of the bank? – because she has got to go directly to the bank and get in a queue.

The mum scrapes around and finds the pound, and she takes the 12 mile journey – the kids are still waiting to go to school remember – she gets over there (which cost herself £1), and she gives Denise £1 to take the bus to the bank. Denise gets to the bank, and takes out her money. To do this, she suffers humiliation knowing that she either would not be able to withdraw her £3 because of the possible minimum ceiling to keep her account open. Instead, she is able to withdraw it, but still suffers the humiliation of the teller knowing she only has £3 in her account.

She uses £1 to get home, gives her mother £1 for the bus and gives her children £1 for food at school.

A smaller number of people are in much deeper poverty. Homeless people are among those at the most extreme end in the UK. It is not just those sleeping on the streets but people who lack a proper, secure home, those who live in a hostel or bed and breakfast, in very overcrowded conditions or at risk of violence or abuse.

Those most at risk of becoming homeless include people with physical or mental health problems, people leaving care, ex-prisoners and asylum seekers and refugees. Asylum seekers get only 70 per cent of the normal rate for Income Support compared with a UK citizen⁶.

Anna Kari/Save the Children



Images of life on a low income do not have to be bleak. This shot is a good example of ‘reportage’ style photography, showing life as it is.

Poverty among working people

A general perception is that poverty in this country is commonly associated with joblessness and unemployment. But about 40 per cent of households classified as being in poverty have at least one person who is earning. Despite the minimum wage, these households are unable to earn enough to afford a basic standard of living.

The Government has tried to “make work pay” by providing tax credits, particularly to families with children. But these are not always enough to raise families out of poverty.

Some people are put off applying for tax credits because of the complexity of the process, or because they fear having their credits cut or stopped unexpectedly. Even though 86 per cent said tax credits were an important or very important part of their income, essential for meeting mortgage and childcare costs, half the people who took part in a 2007 survey by Citizens Advice⁷ said they would be less likely to claim in the future because of their experiences. Eight in ten had been overpaid, and had had to pay back the money, normally through deductions in subsequent benefit payments, thus causing them serious cuts in income.

“People who have low skills and are working long hours for a low income are struggling to survive. We feel left out. We work very hard, but we still cannot afford to buy new clothes or go to the cinema or even go on holiday to visit our families.”

Participant in the Get Heard project, set up by the Social Policy Task Force to enable people experiencing poverty to have their views heard by the UK Government

The mythology of poverty

People in poverty are frequently blamed for their situation. But, in fact, a complex web of wider social, economic and political factors is responsible. Poverty is not an option anyone actively chooses any more than it has ever been. No one wants to be poor.

Blaming people in poverty for their situation is not a new attitude. They have always been blamed and stigmatised by some in society. In the past people in poverty were dismissed in the same way that some regard people in poverty now. But those who have experienced poverty themselves are less likely to ‘blame’ people on a low income. It is also true that people in other parts of Europe are less likely to criticise those on low incomes.

It is easier to look at poverty and its solutions in terms of individual behaviour than at wider features of society affecting people’s life chances.

But poverty itself can be a barrier to self-improvement and ‘getting on’. The daily pressures of living on a low income include limited access to services (such as transport and childcare) and opportunities (employment, education and training), as well as facing prejudice and discrimination.⁸

So solutions need to involve both improving what individuals can do for themselves and how they are helped from outside. Government schemes and initiatives must be put in the context of the large-scale fundamental measures that are needed to tackle the deep-rooted economic causes of poverty.

Some frequently-quoted perceptions – myths – about poverty are described below.

Myth – Poverty only exists because people are too lazy to work

This assumes two incorrect things: firstly, that people who are not working are lazy, and secondly, that working means you are not in poverty.

“I learnt about poverty the hard way ... and it made life a lot more difficult than the media made it out to be. And, you know, that’s why I don’t like these stories you get ‘Mrs Somebody or other gets one thousand, five hundred pounds a week in benefits’ and you’re thinking ‘yeah’. To get benefit you have to battle. You have got to really struggle and, you know, just to get your basic requirements, you’ve got to struggle. But the media, you know, publicises that it’s so easy, there’s so much money floating around, you just go in and ask them for it.”

Male, low income, rural Scotland, quoted in *The media, poverty and public opinion in the UK* by Glasgow Caledonian University, published by JRF, September 2008

People who are not working include pensioners, people with disabilities that prevent them working, lone parents with young children and people who are temporarily out of work. The latest government figures on in-work poverty⁹ show that around half (46 per cent, after housing costs have been deducted) of households in poverty have at least someone in paid employment.

Myth – People on benefit are well off

The basic level of benefit for a single adult works out at £9 a day to cover food, clothes, bills and everything else. This amount has not changed in real terms for 25 years although prosperity has generally increased considerably over this period. Some people, such as asylum seekers and those aged under 25, get even less than this – £6 and £7 a day respectively¹⁰.



Anna Karl/Save the Children



A very simple image that gets to the root of what poverty is about.

“There is very little sympathetic portrayal of poor people. And people are looking for reassuring images, that things are OK, things are fair, and that people at the bottom are there because it’s their fault, and therefore we’ve all earned and merit our position.”

Political commentator, daily broadsheet

Myth – Poverty will always be with us: if poverty is relative, then some people will always be considered poor

Poverty is not having a bit less than the average, it is being far below the normal standard of living. While it is obviously true that some people will always have an income below the average, it is possible to have arrangements that raise incomes to ensure that no one falls a given amount below the average income. The aim of government policy is to provide support for households to escape poverty – though it has yet to be achieved.

Myth – That family can’t be poor, the kids always have new trainers/football shirts/electronic toys

Parents experiencing poverty sometimes provide their children with the same things that their friends have so they don’t feel left out. To do so, they have to make savage cuts to other aspects of their spending to pay for them – such as not eating properly themselves. Debt is another problem facing people on low incomes, who often need to buy essential items on credit or take out loans – often the only place they can get these is from lenders who charge well above ‘normal’ commercial interest rates.

Myth – Immigrants/asylum seekers aren’t in poverty because if they were still in Africa/Eastern Europe what they get here would be considered a fortune

Income has to be considered in the context of the society in which someone lives – and the cost of living in that area. What might be regarded as a reasonable income in an African country, for example, would be impossible to live on in the UK.

Location of poverty

Poverty is not something which is seen during most people's daily lives. It is usually confined to areas, localities and estates which are generally out of sight of the majority of the people and the media. But it exists in all parts of the UK.

There are the higher profile estates – known for the multiple problems which residents face – often located on the outskirts of towns and cities (further exacerbating the isolation of poor inhabitants) and away from 'public' view.

But there are also many pockets of poverty which lie close to city centres and areas of affluence. Some will be known as 'no-go' areas while others will simply be out of sight, out of mind – places where most people would have no reason to visit or even pass through. In addition, many people in poverty will live on 'normal' streets, hidden behind similar facades to those of their better-off neighbours.

Rural poverty is another serious issue. The total number of people affected is smaller than in urban areas but they face particular difficulties. Isolation is perhaps the most serious, with limited – and declining – public transport services, which they are reliant on for shopping: retail services in rural areas are also declining.

Housing is a particular problem for the rural poor. A higher percentage of tenants have exercised the right to buy their homes than in urban areas, and the supply has been further affected by the growth in the number of 'second homes' owned by town and city dwellers. Wages are also generally lower in the countryside.

“Poor families do not have any choice about where they live or the condition of the properties they are allocated. We go where we are put.”

Kathy Kelly, ATD Fourth World

Chapter 2

The media and poverty



“The sooner we stop thinking of poverty as an ‘issue’ and take it more as a set of individual circumstances, the easier it will be to engage people with it”

Of all the major social issues, poverty tends to get the least media attention. Any coverage it *does* get usually focuses on particular issues.

Famine in Africa remains capable of pricking the public's conscience when it receives widespread and emotional coverage. At home, the plight of children in poverty and particularly of older people is far more likely to make it on to the news agenda as these groups are perceived as being more vulnerable and hence deserving of sympathy.

Anna Karf/Save the Children



Pixelation isn't the only way to disguise a child's identity.

But the focus on these groups means that others whose stories are as much in need of being told are ignored. In fact, their situation may be diminished as not being as worthy of coverage or support: “Why should we care about single young men in poverty when there are pensioners who need our compassion and money?”

Those who tend to get pushed to the bottom of the pile include people with disabilities or mental health problems, homeless people, lone parents, immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, ex-prisoners, single working-age people with no children and young adults. For some, their poverty is rarely mentioned, while others are singled out for critical, negative coverage.

“There’s a long tradition of good journalism about poverty and that is not just historic, it goes on to this day and it can be very powerful. The media’s role is in bringing that to people’s attention. So I think it’s worth having a caveat that it’s not all bleak ... however, there is very little coverage of social issues in the tabloids at all. It’s all kind of celebrity-driven news, entertainment news and when it’s in the broadsheets it is often ghettoised to supplements.”

Editor, Sunday broadsheet supplement

Heroes, villains and victims

The current approach to stories about poverty often pigeonholes people, tending to categorise them as heroes, victims or villains.

Anna Kari/Save the Children



The stigma surrounding poverty is one reason people on low incomes might not want to be categorised as poor, or have their identities revealed in photos.

Single mothers are at times stigmatised for the cost they are seen as “inflicting on taxpayers” by not working and claiming benefits. But there may be all sorts of reasons why a single mother cannot work – for example, she may not be able to take employment, however willing she is, if she cannot get childcare or afford to travel.

The fairly constant flow of stories about abuses of the welfare system leads some people to assume that all those on benefits are not only ‘on the fiddle’ but in receipt of a handsome income. Neither of these is true. While there are bound to be occasional cases that appear to confirm such prejudices, the benefits system remains a safety net to provide a very basic income for people who would otherwise have little or nothing.

Occasionally, the media spotlight falls on individuals who have risen above their circumstances to achieve great things. Damon Buffini, the multi-millionaire who is Chairman of private equity company Permira, and Duncan Bannatyne, the entrepreneur of TV’s *Dragons’ Den* fame, both started from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. While these are positive examples, they are few and far between. And, by highlighting them, the implication is that the overwhelming majority of people in poverty have failed

Anna Karl/Save the Children



A clever way of disguising the identities of subjects.

by not achieving as much. Even then, the stories are not always true. Sam Riley was praised by the press for his rise from poor factory worker to actor – he later corrected the stories and admitted his privileged public school background.

“For stories to get reported there has to be an element of drama. If the story has drama and is good enough it will be picked up. Even in documentaries the tendency is to report on people and their deficiencies rather than social causes.”

Editor, regional Sunday newspaper

The knowledge gap

The media has a particularly relevant task in explaining the scale of poverty and the factors that cause it. But there is a huge gap between public perception and the prevalence of poverty, according to surveys which measure opinions and attitudes across EU member states. In the Eurobarometer Poverty and Exclusion report for 2007, only 25 per cent of people in the UK thought there were people living in a “situation of poverty or extreme poverty” in the area where they lived.¹¹

The survey revealed that 22 per cent of UK respondents (compared to an average 10 per cent across the EU) said they never saw the conditions in which people experiencing poverty live. Only 13 per cent said they often saw these conditions, compared to an average of 23 per cent across the EU.

This is reflected in the media as well as the general public. As a senior journalist said at one of the seminars held in preparation for this guide: “We don’t have a great knowledge of poverty. It is not a big subject in our day-to-day work.”

“Journalists simply don’t know what it is like to live with poverty.”

Editor, regional Sunday newspaper

People in poverty – how they view media coverage

By Dan Paskins, formerly of the UK Coalition Against Poverty

In a series of workshops on communication of poverty, discussion groups of people on low incomes were asked for their views on how poverty is discussed in the media. They were given stories from a range of different newspapers about poverty and asked for their responses to them.

Their advice to journalists included “the need to build up trust”, that they ought to realise that people won’t just tell them their life story straight away, because poverty can be a very difficult subject to talk about, especially the fear of being judged by others who will read the story. They should work on stories which challenge people’s attitudes about ‘scroungers’ or people who live in housing estates. For example, when talking about ‘scroungers’ why not talk about tax avoidance and tax evasion as well as benefit fraud? When talking about benefit fraud why not talk about the amount lost in bureaucratic error and also talk about those who do not claim benefits to which they are entitled?

Commenting on an extract from the *Daily Mirror*, written on International Day for Poverty Eradication, 17 October 2006, participants said how it was good to give information and facts on poverty. But participants felt that the photograph which was used was a stereotype and suggested that all families living in poverty conformed to the image of an unhappy lone parent. Why not show the rest of the family (the woman is wearing a wedding ring but there’s no sign of the father in the picture)? They felt that people would just turn over the page and not want to read the rest of the story.

They also felt that the piece would be much more effective if it was less unrelentingly negative. The phrase in the title ‘no hope’ suggested that there was nothing that could be done, and hence no point in people engaging with it. Just by putting a question mark at the end of the strapline, it could give a different tone to the piece, particularly if it included some of the ideas for how to do something about poverty.

VOICE OF THE DAILY MIRROR

Adopting a safe policy

MADONNA'S attempt to adopt a Malawian baby becomes more controversial as each day goes by.

Last night, baby David Banda was flown out of his native country in a private jet, in the care of the superstar's bodyguard and other members of her entourage. Madonna was waiting for him in London.

New aid agencies, charities and rights groups want to halt the adoption and investigate whether it is unlawful.

They want to know if the correct process has been followed - or bypassed because of Madonna's celebrity status.

There are millions of orphaned children around the world yet Madonna chose to adopt a baby whose father is still alive. And there is growing evidence that poor African kids will benefit more if they are sponsored by benefactors and their parents given the drugs they need to fight Aids.

Malawi may be one of the poorest countries in the world but that does not mean stars should be able to simply breeze in and wave their chequebooks to get round normal procedures.

There must be no short cuts - regardless of whether an adoptive mother is one of the most famous women in the world.

Home truths

THERE is no doubt this Labour government has made tremendous strides in trying to reduce domestic violence.

After intense pressure from ministers, the police and courts are finally changing the way they deal with these highly sensitive and harrowing cases.

Now, more battered partners are coming forward and more perpetrators will be punished.

But figures showing an upsurge in incidents when England played badly during the World Cup shows there is still a long way to go in the battle to remove this stain from society.

Netwit Bush

THERE is no doubt George W Bush's presidency is in dire straits.

But sending secret agents to see a teenage girl who called him an idiot on MySpace shows just how much trouble the US really is in.

Keiser and Black

At home with Madonna & Guy!



By BOB ROBERTS
Deputy Political Editor

IT is the bleak and disturbing underbelly of Britain, a level of poverty that disgraces the fourth richest nation on earth.

New figures show that at least 3.4 million children in the UK are blighted by destitution, their parents too poor to feed, clothe or shelter them properly.

Even the government now admits that it is likely to miss its much-vaunted pledge to alleviate child poverty.

But a recently formed confederation of 50 charities, churches and unions - the End Child Poverty Campaign - says the problem is so much, much worse.

The government calculates poverty as an average household surviving on an income of £210 after rent or mortgage has been paid.

But the CFCP says that in fact you could earn almost £100 a week more than that and still be below the poverty line.

Work and Pension Secretary John Hutton admits the government has to "renew its efforts" to tackle the problem and will announce he is reviewing the child-poverty strategy.

But the campaigners say any action needs to be backed with money - and lots of it.

They are demanding an extra quillion to take into benefits and the minimum wage.

And they warn that unless there is a serious assault on poverty, Tony Blair will not get the New Labour pledge he made when he came to power - to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020.

The campaigners scoured government reports and academic research to uncover the key facts about poverty in the UK.

Here is why they say dramatic action must be taken...

ALMOST 10 per cent of single parents cannot afford to buy more than one pair of shoes for their children.

THERE are currently 3.4 million children in poverty, 27 per cent of all British children.

THE UK has the fourth highest level of child poverty of all 25 European Union countries.

FOR the first time, children are more likely to live in poverty than the elderly.

AROUND five per cent of all children live in severe poverty. A SINGLE parent with two children aged 5 and 11 needs £20 a week to rise above the poverty line.

THE highest concentration of child poverty is in London where 41 per cent of children live in poverty.

88 per cent of all single-parent households live below the poverty line.

57 per cent of families with Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds are in poverty.

20 per cent of British families receive government tax credits are still living below the poverty line.

ONLY Italy, Portugal and the Slovak Republic have worse levels of poverty than the UK.

BRITISH poverty rates are 50 per cent higher than those of France and more than twice as high as in the Scandinavian countries.

400,000 children have inadequate diets. THREE quarters of a million children go without a warm waterproof coat or proper shoes in winter.

No heating, no birthdays, no hope..

UK CHILD POVERTY THE FACTS



POOREST CONSTITUENCIES	Are YOU below poverty line?	BY REGION
Percentage of children in poverty	WEEKLY income needed after housing costs (EPC)	East Midlands 26%
Manchester Central 54%	Single person, 25	Eastern 25%
Liverpool Riverside 50%	£10	London 39%
Poplar and Canning Town 49%	£20	North East 32%
Glasgow North East 48%	Single, 25, no kids	North West 29%
Tottenham 48%	£10	Scotland 25%
Hackney South 47%	Single, 25, two children (5 and 11)	South East 21%
Islington South 47%	£20	South West 25%
Bethnal Green and Bow 46%	£20	Wales 28%
Regents Park 45%	£25	West Midlands 30%
Birmingham, Ladywood 45%	Single, 30, two children (5 and 11)	Yorkshire and Humber 29%
	£25	

ONE million children are too poor to afford to visit family, have birthday celebrations or attend weddings.

A BOY in born Manchester can expect to live seven years less than a boy from Barnet, North London because of poverty-related health differences.

SIMILARLY, a girl born in Manchester can expect to live six years less than a girl born in Chelsea.

BABIES from poor families are on average 1.50s lighter than those from rich families because of poor nutrition.

TWO adults with two children would have to work 55 hours a week at the minimum wage to get above the poverty line.

TO be a living wage, the minimum wage must

would need to rise to £7.65 per hour from £5.35 today.

PARENTS must spend an average of £25 a week per child on everyday costs of going to school such as uniforms, trips and PE kit.

TYPICAL cost of a full-time nursery place is £162 a week, making it impossible for many mothers to go back to work.

CHILDREN who are growing up in poverty are more likely to leave school at 16.

CHILDREN from families of unskilled labourers are 15 times more likely to die from a fire at home.

CHILDREN from poor backgrounds have to average 18 decayed teeth by the age of five.

For children from professional families the figure is 1.2.

23 per cent of single parent families cannot afford school trips for their youngsters.

AROUND 32,000 families with children became homeless in 2005.

INGREASING gas and electricity costs means three million families are expected to be unable to heat their homes this year.

AROUND three million people use doorstep moneylenders charging exorbitant interest rates to buy basics such as beds and school uniforms.

SINCE 1999 the government has taken 700,000 children out of poverty by benefits and minimum wage. Another 300,000 are expected to be taken out of poverty to meet its targets.

bob.roberts@mirror.co.uk

RETHINK: John Hutton

Links to other issues

Other social issues frequently connected with poverty lead the news agenda regularly, yet the connection is rarely made.

Individual stories have the power to shed light on these wider problems, but they will only do that if the link is made between the facts of the story – for example, educational under-achievement – and its fundamental causes. Simply by making that connection, journalists can raise awareness of the issues around poverty.

“Debt creates worry, need, illness, stress – that’s what poverty’s about.”

Participant in the Get Heard project – see page 23

People in poverty are more likely to be affected by:

- health problems (physical and mental)
- under-achievement at school
- family breakdown
- poor quality accommodation
- abuse of alcohol, drugs and other stimulants
- violence, as perpetrator or victim.

More information and facts behind these links are included in the ‘Sources and resources’ section at the back of the guide.

Participants at one of the seminars struggled to recollect examples of media coverage of UK poverty; as one participant commented:

“To me it is ... not an issue that is a big thing that is covered on the TV or the papers. It is quite hidden which is why when you originally asked ‘do you think poverty exists in this country?’ that is why I said ‘I am not sure’.”

Chapter 3

The reporting challenge



“If you actually have cases and life examples, it’s very much easier to explain the impact of incapacity benefit on a family”

Let's get the big problem out of the way first. Poverty is depressing. Most journalists have heard the arguments at some time that it doesn't sell papers, it turns off viewers, it repels advertisers. It just isn't relevant to the lives of the readers, viewers and listeners.

But just because something is depressing doesn't mean people don't want to hear about it or that it shouldn't be reported. Murder stories and car crashes are depressing, yet they are part of the staple fare of news, as they always were. So categorising poverty as depressing is no reason to ignore it.

Anna Kari/Save the Children



“Poor families do not have any choice about where they live or the condition of the properties they are allocated. We go where we are put.” See page 28.

What about poverty being irrelevant to the lives of readers and viewers? The media is full of stories about people whose lives bear little resemblance to those of readers and viewers. That is the basis of the celebrity culture which has been the most significant media development in the past decade. And what about sports stars? Or the lives of the super-rich? All receive a great deal of coverage.

Given the numbers of people affected by poverty at one time or another – or who know of friends or family who hit hard times – poverty is a subject clearly relevant to a high proportion of readers. The first *Guardian*/ICM poll of 2008 on economic confidence showed more than 50 per cent of voters were pessimistic about their prospects and wanted public spending maintained rather than tax cuts¹².

The same poll showed that 75 per cent thought the gap between the highest and lowest incomes was too wide. Clearly these are subjects on which readers, viewers and listeners do have an opinion.

If the media gets its coverage of poverty right, with factual coverage and informed opinion, it can have a real influence by improving understanding of and interest in the situation of poor people. It can stimulate and feed debate and ensure that readers, viewers and listeners are better informed. Ultimately, this can help to change the lives of people living in poverty.

Politicians are influenced by what they read, hear and see in the media – and the impact of accurate, powerful and effective coverage on politicians and others with power to bring about change will ensure they take the situation of those in poverty seriously and that poverty moves higher up the political agenda.

“People’s real lives don’t fit neatly into compartmentalised boxes. Someone is never just an example of the aspect of poverty we’re trying to illustrate. To really understand them, you have to understand the background.”

Huw Williams, BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme – see case study, page 59

Practical approaches

The fundamentals of reporting poverty are no different from any other journalism. The journalist's job, as ever, from editors down, is to present the information in a way that makes it accessible and understandable: be sure of the facts and put them in context.

There are opportunities for features and documentaries which deal in depth with the issues. Although these are sometimes dismissed as the sort of journalism that wins awards but not readers or viewers, real-life human-interest stories can be of as much interest as any showbusiness saga.

And stories about poverty need not be a turn-off – the BBC *Newsround* programme *The Wrong Trainers* (see page 67), which focused on children living in poverty, got a record amount of feedback from viewers and hits on the website.

Reports about poverty not only add another element to a multi-faceted publication or programming, they go at least part of the way to answering critics who claim that the media today has become one-dimensional with a focus on celebrity and wealth.

Case studies can really bring stories about poverty alive – real-life stories not only grab the reader, listener or viewer's attention but bring statistics or reports down to a human level. Just hearing what life is like from someone experiencing poverty can change perceptions.

Of course, with the pressures in most newsrooms and offices, it isn't always possible to get out to interview someone. There is limited time for building contacts and developing ideas. But carrying out an interview down the phone may create new problems as many people feel uncomfortable dealing with sensitive issues remotely.

Some voluntary sector organisations that work with people in poverty are ready to help with finding interviewees. There is a comprehensive list of contacts at the back of this guide, some of which may help identify potential interviewees.

One issue is whether interviewees should be paid: could payment undermine the credibility of the story? Even if your organisation does not pay, make sure the interviewee is not out of pocket: for them, travel costs may affect what they can afford to eat that day.

Anna Karf / Save the Children



In the right circumstances, this sort of shot can help illustrate an article on poverty without the need to show people.

It is especially important to treat interviewees experiencing poverty with respect. It can take a lot of courage to go public in associating yourself with a group that may be stigmatised, and a sympathetic hearing is likely to draw out much more than a confrontational approach.

Interviewees may fear they will be harassed or criticised by neighbours or others for talking to the media. This can make them even more reluctant to be interviewed. While it is clearly better to have a named individual, there are times when using a pseudonym might be the best way out.

There are a host of other techniques such as graphics and tables which can add to or enhance a report or feature, particularly in trying to get across often complex statistics in a meaningful and striking way. References and contacts at the back of this book provide helpful links and resources.

From the point of view of newspapers, poverty reporting doesn't have to be restricted to the news pages. As well as providing material for the features pages, it can be relevant to various sections such as money and homes.

Naturally, as poverty is a complex subject, it can lend itself to a series, the approach adopted by the *Sunday Herald* (see page 61).

“If you actually have cases and life examples, it's very much easier to explain the impact of incapacity benefit on a family or the problems of what direct payments mean for disabled people in terms of commissioning their own services. An article on that, a feature on that, whether it's an important issue in social policy or not at the moment, is going to be pretty indigestible unless you actually get a disabled person in there telling how they actually hired their own home help.”

Editor, Sunday broadsheet supplement

Tackling stereotypes and prejudice

The common characteristic of all negative stereotypes of people experiencing poverty is that they are accused of being a drain on society – on the ‘hard-working majority’, who they appear satisfied to take advantage of. There is a resonance of that in the over-used phrase in currency among politicians of ‘hard-working families’ – and usually repeated without question in the media. The implication is that those who don’t work, for whatever reason, are less deserving and that those who do have few problems. Neither is true.

Anna Kari/Save the Children



High housing costs are trapping people in poor housing.

The creation of positive and negative stereotypes of poverty stems from the old but subjective categorisation of ‘the deserving and undeserving poor’. If it were true, it would follow that there must be people who choose to be in poverty. While it is true that some people do not take up paid work and live on benefits instead, that is for a whole host of reasons, such as lack of confidence, the nature and pay of the jobs, the reliability of benefits versus paid work, lack of available child care, travelling difficulties and so on.

When the media is criticised, it is often for creating or reinforcing negative stereotypes and labelling people in poverty as ‘scroungers’, ‘feckless’ or ‘lazy’. Though this may be a view held among a fair proportion of the public, particularly concerning people claiming benefits, that does not make it acceptable. Journalists can play a valuable role in challenging the groundswell of belief that people are in poverty because of their own behaviour and inadequacies and could get out of it if they pulled themselves together.

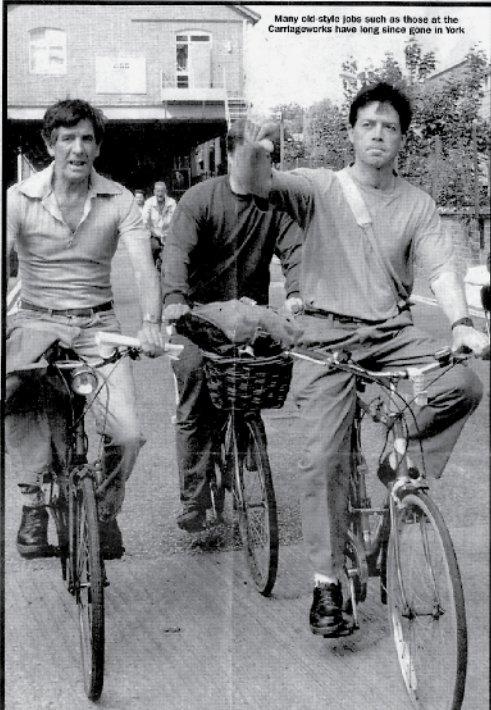
The media can tackle these prejudices as it has helped to tackle other forms of discrimination, such as racism. Journalists themselves need to be aware of negative stereotypes when dealing with stories that involve ‘unpopular’ groups, such as the children of gypsies or refugee families.

It is easy to be dismissive about some of the problems faced by people experiencing poverty in the UK today, yet the skills needed to balance a budget on an inadequate income – when there are no spare resources to cope with unexpected emergencies, such as household repairs, particularly without the benefits of credit cards or a bank account – are rarely considered. Frequently, reports suggest that families in poverty are bad at budgeting. The evidence suggests the opposite is true – they have to be particularly good at budgeting simply to survive.

12 Wednesday, July 18, 2007

The Press www.yorkpress.co.uk

NEWS analysis



Many old style jobs such as those at the Carrigaworks have long since gone in York

Some York people are missing out on the economic boom. STEPHEN LEWIS reports

ONLY a week ago council chiefs were hailing the economic miracle that is York. A study by the Centre For Cities think-tank rated York in the top five cities nationwide in terms of employment rate and population expansion.

The report put York firmly in the premier league in terms of economic growth, boasted council leader Steve Galloway. Yet now a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has revealed that a quarter of the city's population is living on the breadline and one in ten has no job at all.

That doesn't sound much like an economic miracle. So what is happening? It is simply the case that while York as a whole is booming, there is a part of the population that is being left behind. "I think that is a pretty good interpretation of it," admits Ben Wheeler, one of the co-authors of the new Joseph Rowntree study.

It doesn't take a brain surgeon to work out who is being left behind. Last year alone, York was hit by a triple whammy of job losses, when it was announced 945 jobs were going at Nestlé, 459 at Norwich Union and 100 at British Sugar.

That continued part of a trend which has seen the city's traditional manufacturing base over the last ten to 15 years.

New, well paid jobs have come to the city in the hi-tech and financial sectors. But the skilled workers made redundant from the carriage works and chocolate factories were by and large not in a position to take advantage of them.

The jobs went to well-qualified newcomers in other sectors, while York's once well-paid workers struggled by with less good jobs, or ended up on the scrapheap.

David Scott, leader of the Labour group on City of York Council, says there is a danger of York developing into a two-tier economy, one where the majority do well, but a significant minority fall behind.

One of the biggest problems the city faces, he says, is the loss of middle level, skilled manual work - the kind of jobs that once formed the backbone of the city's economy.

He isn't so much concerned about the younger generation, Coun Scott says - they are getting the training and education at school to enable them to take advantage of the new type of jobs. It is the older, established workers who suddenly found themselves out of a job who should be concerned.

So what should we be doing to try to help them? "We need first to see what has pushed people after they left

those jobs, find out where they went to," he says.

We then need proper retraining for those who need it, to help equip them for the changed job market, he says, which entails making sure the city council gives full backing to organisations such as Future Prospects.

The council also needs to do more to attract a wider range of new employers to the city, not only science city and finance jobs, but the whole gamut of employers.

"We need to be saying York is open to all businesses," he says. City council leader Steve Galloway has already said the council's social inclusion working group does more to ensure local people are included from local-city because of poverty.

Green leader Andy D'Agnese says we also have to ensure the new job opportunities that are coming to York are made accessible to local people.

Too often, he says, those made redundant from well-paid manual jobs find themselves trapped in low-paid, unskilled work.

He agrees with David Scott it is proper funding and support for organisations like Future Prospects is essential.

Tony Kadner, Coun Ian Gillies points out, however, that there is a difference between saying some people are less well off than others, and saying those people are in actual poverty.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation accepts that. The measures of poverty and wealth are relative, admits Ben Wheeler. In a society, almost everybody is better off, it need forms that we were a generation ago.

But a significant section of the population is still excluded from things that most of the rest of society look for granted - regular holidays, new clothes and the like (see panel on opposite page).

While there may not be people starving on the streets today, there those who can see others leading a lifestyle far beyond their own. That can be demoralising and can lead to disillusion, depression, and crime.

"I understand that people are on low incomes and there are a lot of people at the bottom end of society that we need to help, but that is different to being in poverty," Coun Scott says.

"Some people get into that poverty trap through their own mistakes and others are there through unfortunate circumstances but I don't think you should be too judgemental about it."

"Everything costs money but we should be putting in an infrastructure to help people help themselves. What we should do is provide housing and jobs for them to work their way out of it."



The Press yesterday

Why being poor is all relative

York Press, 18 July 2007: This feature takes the findings from a Joseph Rowntree Foundation study on poverty and wealth and makes them relevant in a local context. Like

NEWS analysis



The extreme wealth of celebrities such as the Beckhams causes annoyance for some people

The view from Tang Hall...

MIRANDA Legg doesn't hesitate when asked how wealthy she is. "I'm poor!" she says. "I'm a cleaner at York university, and I earn £200 a month for 20 hours." She has a grown-up son who has left home, and a 17-year-old daughter still living with her, who is going to college. So it must be tough. "I is very, very difficult," the 66-year-old, who lives in a Tang Hall council house, says. "I don't get any help with rent or council tax. I don't think that there is much help out there for a lot of people."

The figure of one quarter of York households being on the breadline doesn't surprise her. What does make her snore with disbelief is the suggestion that York is enjoying an economic boom. "I don't see it!" she says. "It is booming for tourists. I don't think it is for residents." One of the problems is that all the new jobs coming into the city require qualifications people of her generation lack. She wouldn't even get a job as a shop assistant at B&N now, she says, because she lacks qualifications. She would willingly undertake training if she had the chance - but it would have to be local, in Tang Hall, not out at York College. "I cannot afford to go there."

It is definitely her generation who are missing out, Miranda says. At least her daughter faces a decent future. "She is in the second year of college, and she will have a good job."

"It is my generation that is being left behind," she says. "But



ABOVE: Miranda Legg RIGHT: Emma and Matthew Darley

there is no point in being angry. You just get on with it." Seventeen-year-old Emma Darley is a mother who describes herself as "very poor". She is a single mum to be expecting a baby in 12 weeks, who lives with her mum, Maureen Darley, in Tang Hall. "I can't go on holiday. I can't go shopping. I can't afford to buy new clothes or maternity clothes," she says.

So does she feel resentful about those who have more than she does? She resents people such as the Beckhams, she says, because their children have things her own son will never be able to have.

Maureen breaks in. "The money those footballers and such get! It is disgusting!" she says. Maureen owns her own penicillin and admits that in general people are better off today than when she was a young girl. "But that is not to say that life is



easy. She may not have to pay rent, "but I pay everything else, and I haven't been on holiday since my husband died eight years ago. I couldn't afford it."

Parts of York are getting left behind, Maureen says. So what is the solution? Higher taxes? Hanna Clarke is a parent. "You could certainly take a bit more from those that can afford it," she says.

Phil McGrath agrees. The 19-year-old electrician of Selby, is in Tang Hall on a job. He has just bought a house with his wife and admits he is doing OK. "There are people that are worse off," he says.

He has no problem with people doing well for themselves. David Beckham? "He's got the talent. If I could do it, I would." Nevertheless, while he pays more than enough in tax, he thinks there are those who could pay more. "If they can afford it, they should pay it," he says.

YOU... THE JURY

The world goes round on the heads of the day. Each day we will ask you to choose on the right or wrong of a recent issue.

Q: Do you think the gap is widening between York's rich and poor?

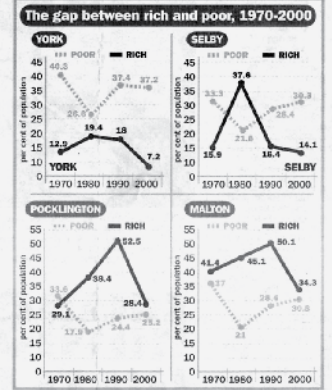
VERDICT

We asked: Do you think York's streets are the dirtiest in Yorkshire?

YES 78% NO 22%

VOTE NOW!

Phone: 01904 221 222-4 for yes or 0501 221 222-4 for no
Text: Enter 50387 and then key in yes or no, send to 88620
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On the breadline?
Lack of money sets poor apart from what is normal

IT SOUNDS shocking to be told that one tenth of York people are "very poor" and one quarter "on the breadline".

Those, however, are relative terms which do not imply that people in York are literally starving.

Breadline poor, as defined by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in its new study, indicates those who are "excluded in participating in the norms of society". In other words, those who can't afford to go on holiday, go out for a meal occasionally, go to the cinema or theatre or take the things most people take for granted.

They are contrasted in the Joseph Rowntree study with a group of people, the exclusive wealthy, who are equally set apart from society - by their wealth. "They can afford to exclude themselves from the rest of society," says Iain Wheeler, of the foundation. "They don't have to use state education, don't have to use state health care."

don't therefore show that lots of York people are living in abject poverty. They simply indicate that a substantial group is less well off than the rest - and that this hasn't changed much in the past 30 years.

In 1970, 40.5 per cent of York's population was categorised as breadline poor or very poor. In 2000, that had fallen by just three per cent, to 37.2 per cent.

Those categorised as rich or exclusive rich, meanwhile, fell from 12.9 per cent in 1970 to 7.2 per cent in 2000.

The proportion of the city's people classified as rich fell, in other words - while the proportion classified as poor stayed roughly the same.

But that's only relatively speaking. In real terms, most of us are probably better off than we were back then.

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the Sunday Herald cutting (page 61), this piece includes the views of local people, from residents to a senior local councillor, and facts and figures explaining the bigger picture.

“People may not want their picture taken next to stories about poverty – especially if it puts them in a bad light. There is a stigma attached to poverty.”

Participant in the Reporting Poverty seminar in Manchester

“In Northern Ireland, journalists don’t use words such as ‘scroungers’, or ‘dossers’ or other insulting or degrading terms, mainly because they are aware of living in a community and people know one another. I think this is something that appears more in the nationals, where the journalists will rarely if ever meet the people they are describing.”

Gerry Millar, *Daily Mirror*

Words and images

Mind your language

Language is always evolving and changing. In the last 30 years or so, a lot of that change has been to do with how people and groups of people are described.

It has been recognised that broad brush and careless ways of describing and grouping people can be demeaning and offensive, and might contribute to antagonism. Many times they can be simply inaccurate.

The changes started with tackling issues of sexism and racism when it was realised that some terms were being misused. Attempts to alter the language have frequently been met with accusations of political correctness (particularly where zealots for change have overstated a case) but it has been interesting to see how many terms which were originally described as PC have been accepted and absorbed into general usage.

Some of that evolution has happened alongside changes in legislation, particularly in the areas of equality and discrimination. The Code of Practice of the Press Complaints Commission reflects this. It specifically says the press *“must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual’s race, colour, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability”* and *“Details of an individual’s race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story”*.

Similarly, the Code of Conduct of the National Union of Journalists states in its professional principles that a journalist *“Produces no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person’s age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation”*.

Poverty as an issue clearly is not directly comparable with these but it does have parallels in that it is about disadvantage experienced by certain people. It is a subject where there are many pejorative words in common use which stigmatise people.



One common phrase used is ‘the poor’, although people who are poor are not a generic group, in the same way that disabled people are not. It is better to say ‘poor people’.

‘Impoverished’ and ‘poverty-stricken’ were highlighted as stigmatising by participants at the seminars held across the UK during preparation for this guide.

Other words that were similarly considered to be stigmatising were ‘scroungers’, ‘spongers’, ‘dossers’ and ‘feckless’. Using them in any article about poverty can be derogative and should be avoided. Terms such as ‘sink estates’ need to be used sparingly.

‘Handouts’ is often used pejoratively and may well be regarded as offensive. Benefits and tax credits are entitlements, and many people receiving them will have contributed through tax and National Insurance payments when they have been in work. It is the word ‘insurance’ that is relevant here – no one would describe a payment for, say, a car repair as a handout.

It is good practice to avoid any language that suggests a person experiencing poverty is to blame for their situation. Referring to any group of people is a sensitive matter and what is acceptable language can change.

The following terms are currently used by many working on poverty issues and generally regarded as ‘neutral’:

- people in poverty
- people on a low income
- people receiving/in receipt of benefits.

These are long and certainly not going to make a snappy headline. But careful thought does need to be given to how specific phrases and words are used to ensure that the impression given is correct and that the facts are accurate.

It is easy to dismiss people's reactions to specific words as over-sensitive, but it cannot be in the interests of a media organisation to insult a significant number of readers, viewers and listeners who are themselves experiencing poverty, or who may have done so in the past.

Picture this

Pictures, as ever, clearly help to sell and tell a story. But poverty is one of the most difficult subjects to illustrate. What does it look like in the UK today? It is far from the images of Gin Lane and Beer Street portrayed by William Hogarth in the 18th century. Or starving African children.

Anna Kari/Save the Children



An evocative way to show poverty while at the same time protecting the child's identity.



The most important thing is to show people as they really are, and not to expect them to live up to a preconception of what poverty should look like.

One challenge is finding someone willing to be photographed or filmed. While some people are happy to be identified, many do not want to be portrayed as 'poor'. If someone chooses to expose their life or family to public scrutiny, there is a risk of being stigmatised, or, in the case of children, bullied.

Where people do not want to be recognised, there are, of course, ways of disguising their identity through silhouettes, over-the-shoulder shots, or pixelation.

For newspapers, there may be circumstances in which it is possible to use symbolic photographs, perhaps showing aspects of the place where the interviewee lives.

It is good practice to get a consent form signed – already this is common in television and it could avoid potential problems for other branches of the media.

Captions can have a particular significance for the person who has been photographed, and can completely change the context of the picture. Subeditors should try to ensure that these are accurate, fair and handled sensitively. The positive impact of an otherwise understanding piece can be wrecked if the caption beside it says something like: 'Mary Smith in the hovel she calls home'.

It is also vital for picture desks and photographers to make sure that the correct details appear on any photo when it is sent to the library. In one case a newspaper used a picture of a child in the correct context but it was then re-used inaccurately some time later to illustrate a feature on a totally different subject.

Chapter 4

Telling the story: how journalists see it



“We need to report poverty in all its ugliness, yet without exploiting it”

The production of this guide has involved a wide range of participants including people experiencing poverty, those working for charities and campaigning organisations, and journalists from a range of media. Here a number of journalists and film-makers explain how they see the issues and how they have tackled some of the problems to achieve a balanced and sensitive approach.

‘Deserving’ vs ‘undeserving’

By Ros Wynne-Jones, Senior Feature Writer, *Daily Mirror*

Reporting poverty of any kind is riven with dilemmas – are you a voyeur or a genuine force for change? Are you highlighting the issues or selling papers? Are you reflecting a hidden reality of inner-city Britain or glamorising a culture of crime?

Since the concept of the ‘deserving poor’ emerged in Victorian times, editors – and, as importantly, readers – have assigned different types of morality to different types of poverty. The ‘undeserving poor’ are the Asbo kids and the hoodies, the drug-addicted and long-term unemployed. On the other hand, the ‘deserving poor’ look a lot like middle Englanders fallen on hard times.

When Damilola Taylor died in 2000, I remember spending time at the North Peckham estate and its environs, talking to kids in hoods before they had become collectivised as ‘hoodies’. I met a girl there who, at 14, was one of the angriest, most violent, most foul-mouthed people I have ever met. She threatened me with violence and told me how she enjoyed mugging people on the street for kicks.

In the week I spent visiting the estate, the girl became a kind of volatile guide, turning up every day and hanging around and asking questions and then storming off in a rage. After a friend of mine had been mugged close to the estate and terrorised by a girl gang, I asked whether she ever felt anything for the people she mugged with her gang of girlfriends.

“No,” she said. “The way I see it, no one ever gave a fuck when my mum got kicked down every flight of stairs in our tower block. And no one ever gave a shit when I went into care. So don’t expect me to give a fuck for anyone else.”

Yet she clearly did. She radiated loneliness. The problem was a gap in experience – how to explain to people that this girl in a hoodie, with a face made ugly by violence wasn’t all she seemed on the surface. That life had made her that way.

You knew that even the photograph of her, in a dirty tracksuit, would immediately bring up the label ‘undeserving’. There was the sense that the purpose of the piece had simply been to stare at the poor as if it were a Bedlam sideshow.

The Vicky Pollard stereotype of the feckless, stupid, badly dressed girl, and its myriad versions by Catherine Tate and others, reveal exactly how threatened Middle England feels by our ‘undeserving’ poor. This ‘comedy’, after all, is where our society’s ‘underclass’ is castigated these days.

And smug Middle Englanders laugh loudly from discomfort that such people – presented as poorly educated with bad teeth and thin vocabularies, people blighted by the poverty of aspiration – still exist in the Peckhams and the Moss Sides and the St Ann’s.

Seven years later we are still failing people like the girl on the North Peckham estate, damaged so badly by life that their only empowerment is to attack others. It is a vicious circle in which the media also plays its part.

We need to report poverty in all its ugliness, yet without exploiting it. It is the dilemma of the photographer in a famine zone facing an emaciated child. And it is a dilemma in UK poverty terms that we are only starting to explore now.

The story of the Farepak savers

By Huw Williams, BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme

“Some people are poorer than others” is never going to be a news story. But “people from deprived areas die younger”, or “... carry more knives”, or “... drink more buckfast” or “... don’t do so well at school” or “... smoke more” are all the kinds of news stories that come up over and over again. And for a time, at the end of 2006, “people from deprived areas lose all their Christmas savings” hit the headlines.

BBC editors committed themselves to covering the collapse of the Farepak hampers and vouchers scheme, on radio, television and online. I reported on the issue for Radio Four’s *Today* programme.

We needed “victims” (“case studies” or “real people”, if you prefer). That’s a feature of a lot of reporting. I think it’s partly because that’s the way you make a story live, and help people to engage with it.

But the downside of having to have an example is that people’s real lives don’t fit neatly into compartmentalised boxes. Someone is never just an example of the aspect of poverty we’re trying to illustrate. To really understand them, you have to understand the background ... the court case ... the illness ... the family history ... whatever it may be. Trouble is, in a short report I’m not likely to have enough time to tell the whole story, so there’s a risk a complicated person may come over as rather one-dimensional.

The case study may alienate the viewer, listener or reader, especially if they don’t match our preconceptions. I remember hearing about a television crew doing a report from a scheme in the east end of Glasgow. Halfway through the reporter took the charity worker who was helping them find interviewees to one side and told him: “These people aren’t poor enough. They’ve got carpets”.

And we do often rely on charities, or campaign groups, to find us people to talk to. That means that, as journalists, we're handing over a crucial part of the story to someone else, who's got their own agenda. To cover the Farepak story, I needed help from the Unfarepak campaign website, local money advice centres and Citizens Advice Bureaux, and from credit unions.

The other feature of many of my reports was the use of pundits ... often from those same organisations. Of course, that helps to supply important context, and give the bigger picture. But do we always need experts to give credibility to what real people tell us? The experts on poverty, after all, are those who are experiencing it.

And listening back to some of my reports now, they sound a bit like reports from an exotic foreign country. Of course, for many listeners to Radio Four it would have been a journey into a world they probably didn't know anything about. We really did have to explain who the Farepak savers were, and why the collapse of the firm mattered so much to them.

Problems in reporting poverty

By Neil Mackay, investigative journalist, film-maker and author

There are a variety of problems for any journalist trying to report on poverty.

Firstly, you have to try and find some way to circumvent existing prejudices amongst both colleagues and readers.

It's common to hear the phrase "why should we care?" That's predicated on the belief that these days if you are in poverty, it's your own fault – either because of drug and alcohol misuse or because you are feckless and lazy.

SAVE THE CHILDREN'S VIEW

John Grieve, director of Save the Children Scotland, says the state "has to take responsibility for the day-to-day care of children in which many children are growing up in today".

Grieve, who says, "Sadly, the state is not doing enough to help the children who are in the care of the state. The state has a primary responsibility".

The agencies meant to tackle child poverty are "Marvellous" in terms of resources and political commitment, he says, adding that we need to move away from "bureaucratic political machines" for more direct political behaviour.

What would it be like if the government is more directly involved in the care of children, such as the "Yes" for Scotland? Grieve says the state has the money to help every child in poverty. "There are people in what we call 'poor' areas who are in some areas but not all. The state is not doing enough to help the children who are in the care of the state. The state has a primary responsibility for the day-to-day care of children in which many children are growing up in today".

Grieve says the political commitment to tackle child poverty is not there and the government is not doing enough to help the children who are in the care of the state. The state has a primary responsibility for the day-to-day care of children in which many children are growing up in today".

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Once you're in these flats you're doomed ... you can't get out

From previous page

The flat is as chaotic as the lives of the people who live in it. There are many families like the Wards, families who have hunkered under the pressure of one problem after another. The Wards are luckier than others in that they are a social worker, but these days have done little to lessen the chaos of their lives. In the end, it is the children who are trapped in circumstances such as those who suffer most.

Marie is sitting on her couch watching her 14-year-old son, Paul, who is sitting on the floor, looking at the TV. This is a family who clearly love each other but who are struggling to cope, partly due to the behavioural problems of oldest child, Paul. "He's grabbed me before," Marie says, "and dragged me down on the floor and he's stamped on me and jumped on me. Once, when I had my feet in here," she points, pointing at the floor of the living room where she sleeps. "He put the quilt over my head and tried to suffocate me. It's very frightening sometimes."

Her partner, Paul, the elder of his two, came into the living room wearing his trademark Celtic top. He looks imposing and bears a large, nasty scar down the side of his face, but he's as kind and friendly as Alan. A combination of their tough circumstances and easy-going nature, however, means that they find it almost impossible to control their children.

Paul jokes in the conversation, adding his own comments on his son's violence. "He kicked me in the privates the other day. I went down on the floor - he caught me a good one. Then he kicked me in the face and I got backed at him and said 'I'm your da, you don't do that.' He just put in my face and ran out of the house."

Paul has mental gaps, building a shattered world together and finds it hard to restrain his son when he spirals out of control. Marie looks up from looking at her son and says, "He has a bit of anger. He's brought an element



There's people who have been here for 30 years. I can't imagine how they must feel

of chaos into the family. It can be frightening.

Paul the elder takes me on a tour of the flat. The best rooms in the house is where the girls sleep, but even that one has been graffiti'd over by Nicole. The family had a new carpet fitted in the room a few days ago, but they know it will be ruined in a matter of months because of the rising damp that causes water to run down the walls, so they've not wet days, removing paper and destroying carpets.

He shows me the rail in the living room used to keep some of the children's clothes on - there isn't enough space so some of their clothes in the two bedrooms. Clothes have to dry by being hung over the backs of doors. When all the family are together in the living room, it causes a bit of stress and frustration.

In the bathroom a pipe has to be held in place when it's blocked, otherwise water would spill over the floor.

"There's a lot of people in the same situation here," says Paul. "Once you are in the flats you're doomed, you can't get out of them. There's people who have been in the flats for 30 years, that still can't get out and want a house. We've only been here since 1999. There's people who have been here for 30 years, I can't imagine how they must feel."

He says his recovery from drug addiction is going well. "I used to be a heroin drug user," he explains. "I smoked heroin. I never injected it. I'd do it and was in and out of the jail. I was put on methadone for 18 months. I was doing good, but they took me off my course."

"I'd been clean for three and a half years, but then at Christmas I went off the rails. I got my methadone dose put back up and now I'm back to normal. I think I'll off the straight and narrow as I was depressed, bored, cramped in the house with nothing to do." Later, Paul is talking about his hopes and dreams for his children. "Not to turn out like me. It's how he sums up his wishes for his lives.

There are a few social hazards in this family home, perhaps surprisingly for those who view poverty as stark black-and-white terms. Computer games and DVDs are scattered around the house. Some sociologists have coined the phrase "Playstation Poor" to describe families such as the Wards who, although they live on or below the poverty line, still enjoy the modern. It's hard to find a good TV or a games console.

The last time Paul and Marie had a night out together was when they went to see *Training Day* in the cinema. That was 1996. They are just 31 years old. There was a crowded family to help them out. Marie has suffered of and on with depression and panic attacks.

"We've been together now 14 years," says Paul. "We've known each other since primary school. My mother died when I was 15. Then Marie's dad died, then Marie's dad and then my dad. From then on, it's been me and Marie all the way. The worst have no grant and no council housing, they can go and stay with us at the weekend."

"I'd like a break at Baulton's on something just a week, but for me and Marie, as even a night out. The only time we go out together is when we take the baby for a walk in the park or go down to buy the weekly groceries. He points at Shannon as her mother's knee. "But when that see you gonna up, we'll still kind of young - we'll be in our 80s, and we'll make up for it."



More used to working in the third world, Save The Children is now helping Glasgow youngsters out of poverty. By Neil Mackay

The Baulton Street flats are taking me on a tour of their home patch in Dalmeida - the gritty, paint and walls, abandoned doors and boarded-up flats that make up one of Glasgow's

most deprived areas. They are showing me the mess - graffiti tags of bad names - on the walls, and signs such as "F*** the Pds", "Bama 1800", "KKL", "TIP", and "Young Bala, Flow", the name of the local street gang. We're walking through what was once a fashionable set of apartment blocks. The place is riddled with broken bottles, glass shards, a brick not covered in graffiti. Some of the flats are boarded up, a mattress lies in the street, the windows are either broken or boarded up with iron gates, ladders and hanging out in the dark abandoned rooms, which seem in water and smell of smoke.

They walk onto broken steps in a fenced playground in the shadow of abandoned tenement blocks. It's too unsteady to step there long, as the kids - six of them, all aged between 11 and 13 - go for a walk along the banks of the Clyde where it flows dry and frothy through the most real, and some of the toughest areas of Glasgow.

In response to what some critics see as the state simply abandoning the poor, charities like Save The Children have moved in, saying they are not prepared to stand by and see every kid from a poor background go to the wall. Save The Children may be more used to working in war and disaster zones such as Angola or Bangladesh but it has set up an outpost in Dalmeida, and is now running the lives of local kids around. The charity sees its role as simply showing the politicians that there is an alternative. Some are now writing on controversially demanding that graffiti be removed, talking to town planners about cleaning up the environment and



Some 3.8 million

youngsters across the UK were labelled as officially poor in the latest statistics for 2006.

The year before, the figure stood at 3.6m children.

Tony Blair's administration promised to halve child poverty by 2010. Now

almost nobody believes that goal is attainable. To meet this target, Labour has to take more than 1m children above the poverty line in just three years.

Burnardo's, the children's charity, called the figures 'a moral disgrace'

POVERTY ALLIANCE'S VIEW

There are too many people that Rachel Jury of Goodfunds Poverty Alliance wants to address. The first is that those in poverty can't really be poor if they can afford cigarettes, DVDs and PlayStation. The second is that those who are poor but who can't be poor if they can't live a normal life in Britain today.

Jury believes that to say that those in poverty can't have a few luxuries is wrong in a democracy.

"It's human nature to want the odd luxury thing," she says. "We live in a consumerist world and having a TV is judged to normal life in Britain. And obviously people get left out to live up to the dream."

When asked why the poor can't help themselves, Jury explains that "there are multiple barriers to helping yourself if you are born into poverty in Britain. There is very little social mobility in this country. You have a very slim chance of working your way out of poverty."

the police about the lack of local law enforcement. Rather than tracking their area as fully standing by and watching their contemporary street wars, these youngsters are trying to change where they live for the better.

They are, of course, no angels. They want, a few would say they are wise beyond their years about issues such as sex, drink, drugs and violence. But here The Children's Centre has given them a new way of life and self respect.

"We're in the right location for education, shops and crime," says Kasia. "You walk around a corner and there's a new park, you walk around another and someone's spraying graffiti..." The friend Davina chimes in. "Yes, you walk around another corner and some?" "A field".

As we walk alongside the Clyde, with Celtic's football stadium in the distance, Paul chats to me about life for kids in Dalmeirach. "This place can be a little area to live in," he says. "When you see public street to people they think you're a piker. But that's not all true, there are plenty of good people in the area." It's the "new north" who run the place, he says, and the pokers who fall to control them.

"It's quite proud of where I live," Paul says me, "even though it's got its problems. Giving fighting is a big issue

around here. There are three areas kids from here have gang fights with - the Bridgeton, Burnside and Dalmeirach. We are kind of in the centre. Everyone goes up for a fight every now and then. It can be fun - but it can be dangerous too."

If Paul doesn't join the army, he wants to fight - but going to work around in Dalmeirach. We're not because he likes his neighbourhood that he's planning to stay, however - there is also a football field among many coal and kids of going outside their area. Lots of teachers say some kids' families haven't materialised beyond their grounds. Working has to be able to end up in a footballing group that leads to hospital.

"It's too cheap to keep away," says Paul. "You want to stay where it's safe. If you want going fighting, as a kid, there might be someone in another area who'd give you a shot if you moved away. Here you know all the people - it's nice and safe."

He agrees that kids are territorial. "A kid you see walking here from another scheme or school here got a shot. If there were five or six here, not age matching on a street corner and he walked by, they'd be like - they wouldn't care. They'd get lost down on the ground, punch him, kick him. It's just for a kicking unless he got up and fought back. If he did that, he'd end up in hospital."

Bobby Street kids have found a voice through the Save The Children project

Photograph David Gillanders

Watch our child poverty video at www.savethechildren.org.uk

It's just as bad for girls. Nicola, one of the girls in the group tells me. "Lasses are often a lot more vicious than boys. They just attack you. If you aren't from their area, you'll get a shot. Some lasses carry knives, others just want to hurt you so you'll never come back to their area."

What about the police? "There's not enough cops here," Paul gives me. "There's only one CCTV camera and it's always focused on the shops. The police never come about this way, they never drive by here at all."

Ben Williams is the youth worker at the Save The Children east end project, which these kids attend. "It was on one of the evenings they live in," he says.

"Many kids are looking for a way out and we provide that. They're always talking about having something to do, so we try to give them a voice in the community, the change that we've seen in these kids in just a few months in prison. They are fantastic characters. They are the softies - all we want to do is help them believe that."

"A lot of people ask, 'What's Save The Children doing in the east end?' They're surprised. But Glasgow has a huge amount of problems. One in four live in poverty. We don't need to fly around the world to study a different one, we can make a difference on our own doorstep."

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I tend, therefore, when reporting on poverty, to write about children or families with children. It's difficult for even the hardest and most cynical heart to say that a child is to blame for its own circumstances. 'Using' the child as a kind of shield, I can then explore wider issues that simply reporting on adults would prevent me from doing. It gives me access to the reader without a wall of preconceptions standing in the way.

Then we come to the gate-keepers: those in the so-called 'poverty industry'. While many have been incredibly helpful to me over the years, some stand in the way of a reporter, even when the journalist's writing will further their own agenda. An example of this would be a charity dealing with families in poverty refusing point-blank to even consider putting a writer in touch with a family to interview.

When this occurs, I tend to wonder why the charity exists, as they are not using the media to get across the political points they wish to make and therefore failing the people they purport to care for.

Of course, it's understandable that the charity would wish to protect families from exploitation, but when the structure of the journalist's work has been guaranteed and promises given that any interviewee will be in control of what they say, what they do and how the writer can behave with them, then the fear of exploitation should not be an issue.

Another point: why not send a member of the charity's staff along with the journalist to any interviews to ensure that the family is protected?

Lastly, we come to the interviewees themselves. I have written many pieces focusing on families in poverty and while nearly all have been happy to be associated with the final piece – believing that it gave them a voice and highlighted the problems of their lives in a truthful and honest way – some have been very angry and disappointed. Despite agreeing that there were no factual inaccuracies, omissions or exaggerations in the final

copy, some interviewees simply do not like seeing the realities of their lives displayed in print or on film. It embarrasses or shames them.

That leaves a very bad taste in a writer's mouth. You know you haven't done wrong, but the interviewee feels aggrieved and therefore the journalist must have a sense of guilt and responsibility. Perhaps you feel you didn't explain the consequences enough.

Whatever the case, it's better to report the truth, even if some people don't like it, than to leave some of society's worst problems festering in the dark.

Child poverty: filming Ewan

By Rachel Hellings, independent film-maker

At the outset, we discussed how we should approach potential contributors, for we knew that finding and getting access to case studies wasn't going to be easy. We realised, too, that the terminology and language we used would be important. We decided that the word 'poverty' wasn't going to do us any favours. It can be offensive and it's vague. Instead we favoured terms such as 'low income' or 'disadvantaged'.

One of the biggest problems we faced was how to visualise poverty. By its very nature, it's an absence of something and therefore not obviously visual. This was particularly apparent when making the film about Ewan, a teenager who found himself homeless and living in rural poverty.

Our first problem was how to convey rural poverty – we were filming in a picturesque Cornish town and all our shots were very beautiful! The use of sync here was critical: by laying Ewan's commentary about the violence and unemployment that exists in the town over the picturesque shots, we were able to change the tone of the piece to reveal a very different story and challenge the perception of an idyllic Cornish village.

Secondly, Ewan's story was retrospective and therefore there were no visible signs of 'poverty' apparent now. So we looked to enhance his words by using quite stylised images of Ewan which helped to convey the feelings of desperation and isolation he'd experienced.

Anonymity was something we really battled with. Children who are disadvantaged often feel marginalised and we were concerned that filming could exacerbate the problem.

We also had to ask if there might be adverse reactions after the broadcast. So we decided to make at least one of our films anonymous – there are clear cases where anonymity is essential, such as covering a child refugee/asylum seeker story.

We were always mindful of our duty of care. In one particular film, *Kelly*, we were concerned about the snap judgements and blame an audience might apportion to someone who was addicted to crack and heroin at 16, and at 18 was expecting a baby. We tried to increase levels of understanding by letting her tell as much of her story as possible. With the use of statistics, we also tried to make her story representative.

Poverty is complicated and we sometimes found it helpful to include another person's perspective. We used a project worker to give us an overview of the issues and social disadvantage facing young people in her area. This added a valuable dimension that we wouldn't have got from the children themselves.

The Wrong Trainers

By Kez Margrie, film-maker

After our animation *The Wrong Trainers* was shown on BBC One's *Newsround*, it was responsible for more hits on the programme's website than ever before – Dillon's story on its own has been watched nearly 100,000 times, and all the stories together clocked up over 200,000 viewings in 10 days.



The Wrong Trainers successfully used animation to help tell the stories of children experiencing poverty.

Comments from young viewers aged 8–12 who saw *The Wrong Trainers*:

“I really enjoyed *Wrong Trainers* because I also have these sorts of problems myself and it made me realise that I’m not alone and that the government should really do more.”

“I live in a small village with nothing to do and I get bullied because we don’t have money and we get some help.”

“I didn’t know that there was such a high percentage of poor people living in Britain. I thought that it was only in other countries.”

“It made me cry to hear them, and I think we take for granted what they don’t have.”

We had known for some time that, when making programmes for children, it is important to allow for empathy. It is hard to argue with someone who is telling you their story. The person becomes more than a statistic – there will be things about them that the viewer relates to despite possibly being miles apart in other ways. For adults, children telling their own stories is very powerful, too.

People living on the margins of society are rarely given a voice – or, rather, rarely have the confidence to take the space to shout.

The biggest thing I learnt was how mental health is so tied into poverty – yes, there is enough money to go round, if you’re careful, but the stigma and low self-esteem has a huge impact on aspiration and creates the poverty cycle.

I decided to focus on ordinary kids with a story to tell – children who are in *your* school, who are *your* friends, who *you* sit next to at lunchtime – yet who also just happen to be poor.

But we know that headlines and shock are needed to get people interested, so we had to strike a careful balance. Children also didn't understand *why* there is poverty here – this is *why*, after the animation section of our film, we encouraged them to push the red button taking them to the BBC's interactive service, where they could see the children who took part in the project challenging someone in authority who had influence over their situation. This worked very well and handed control over to the kids.

What I learnt from making *The Wrong Trainers* is that the sooner we stop thinking of poverty as an 'issue' and take it more as a set of individual circumstances, the easier it will be to engage people with it.

There's no point in directly confronting public perception as it will shut off the dialogue – which is why we deliberately chose to include the more extreme edges of the poverty that these kids experienced every day.

The biggest challenge is breaking the cycle – we need to start work with young people now and that, more than anything, means education!

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/specials/2006/the_wrong_trainers/default.stm

Chapter 5

Sources and resources



“It’s better to report the truth, even if some people don’t like it, than to leave some of society’s worst problems festering in the dark”

Definitions

Poverty has its own jargon, or shorthand, like any other topic and activity. Below are the most frequent – and important – words and phrases that a journalist is likely to come across. Explanations of fuel poverty and child poverty are based on information available from Consumer Focus and Child Poverty Action Group, both organisations which can provide more information.

‘Relative’ and ‘absolute’ poverty

These are the two main definitions of poverty and an understanding of them is important in analysing how poverty changes over the years.

‘Relative’ poverty looks at how the incomes of people living in poverty compare with the average incomes of people in general. This is the measure generally accepted by governments and experts on poverty. The figure is set at 60 per cent of median (middle) income. (The figure varies depending on household circumstances – thus, for instance, it is higher for households with children.) Those with incomes below that 60 per cent figure are those regarded as in relative poverty. As incomes in the economy rise, so that 60 per cent figure rises, thus showing how the numbers in relative poverty are changing.

‘Absolute’ poverty is a term used in various different ways to denote a poverty level that does not change over time, in terms of the living standard that it refers to. It stays the same even if society is becoming more prosperous. An absolute poverty line thus represents a certain basic level of goods and services, and only rises with inflation to show how much it would cost to buy that package.

But this begs the question of where the line should initially be set. One notion of an absolute poverty line is literally subsistence – people below this line lack food, shelter, warmth or clothing. Another usage, more relevant to the UK, is to take the line defined by relative poverty at a particular point in time, and to hold it steady in the following

years. The present UK Government uses this measure to see how many people today are living below the living standard defined as the poverty line in 1997.

According to this measure, ‘absolute’ poverty has halved under the present Government, even though relative poverty has only declined by 10 per cent. This should be interpreted as showing that many people in poverty have had their incomes lifted above the level considered acceptable in 1997, but most of these remain below the acceptable level today because general living standards have also risen.

Fuel poverty

People who spend more than 10 per cent of their net income on fuel are defined as living in fuel poverty. The Government has a target of eliminating fuel poverty in all vulnerable households by 2010, as required under the Warm Homes & Energy Conservation Act 2000.

Child poverty

The current government definition is “children living in households with needs adjusted (‘equivalised’) incomes below 60 per cent of the median income... Income is adjusted for different need (so called ‘equivalisation’) on the principle that the same income will stretch further in a smaller family than a larger one”.

The Government committed itself to cut child poverty by a quarter between 1998/99 and 2004/05, by half by 2010/11, and altogether by 2020. It introduced the Child Poverty Bill in June 2009, putting this commitment into legislation.

www.cpag.org.uk/info/briefings_policy.htm

Before and after housing costs

The Government's aim to halve child poverty is now based on income levels before housing costs are taken into account. It prefers this measure because it helps international comparison – and, as the table shows, the numbers are lower. However, many poverty campaigners and research organisations prefer to use after housing costs figures because this is a more effective measure of disposable income, particularly given the relatively high housing costs in the UK.

Children living in poverty in the UK: numbers and % of all households

	2004/05	2005/06
After housing costs	3.6m (28%)	3.8m (30%)
Before housing costs	2.7m (21%)	2.8m (22%)

(Simplified table based on HBAI figures as shown by Child Poverty Action Group paper: *Changes in measurement*)

Poverty and associated problems

Health and disability

- Disabled working-age adults are twice as likely as non-disabled adults to be in poverty¹³. Disability greatly reduces the likelihood that someone is able to work.
- The proportion of men and women with a long-standing illness or disability is significantly higher among people in the 'poorest fifth' of the population – 45 per cent of men compared to 25 per cent on average incomes and 10 per cent of those on the highest incomes, and 40 per cent of women, compared to 15 per cent of those on the highest incomes.

- A quarter of men and women on the lowest incomes are at high risk of developing a mental illness.

Family/relationship breakdown

Family breakdown can be both a cause and a result of poverty, but is an issue affecting the UK population in general. Statistics published in *Social Trends*¹⁴ show that a quarter of children now live with one parent, and that the number of lone mothers bringing up three or more children has trebled since the 1970s. The stress of living in poverty can put great strain on relationships, while the breakdown of a relationship or family can leave people in poverty. Some people might find themselves homeless or without an income.

Housing

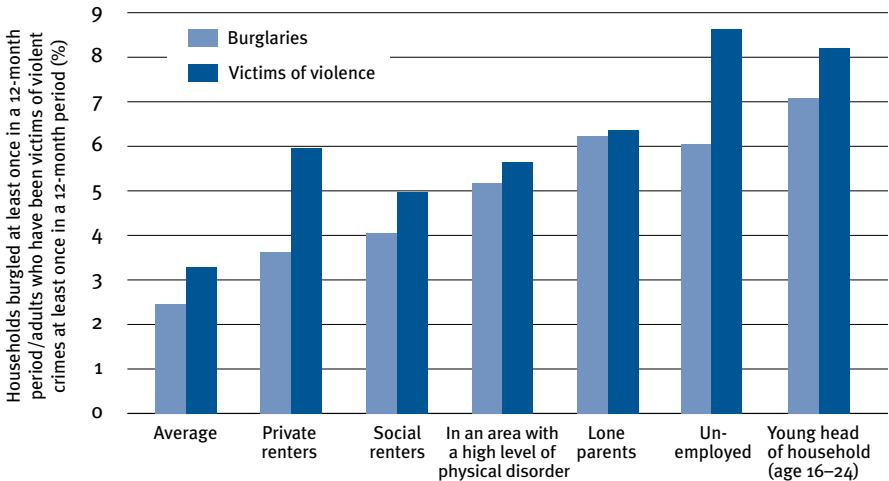
The link between poverty and housing runs both ways. High housing costs, especially rising mortgage and rent costs, can tip some households over the edge into poverty¹⁵. Poverty impacts on housing too, limiting access and choice, obliging people to live in poor conditions and, in extreme cases, resulting in homelessness. According to estimates from Shelter¹⁶, there is a backlog of some 910,000 households in England alone who need social rented housing.

Victims of crime

Statistics from the Home Office show that lone parents and unemployed people – two groups of people who are often among those in poverty – are twice as likely to be burgled or the victims of violence as the average person (see chart).

Since the mid-1990s, people have become more concerned by the presence (or perceived presence) of antisocial behaviour and physical disorder in their neighbourhoods. Crime (or fear of crime) and disorder have been found to play an important part in both triggering and reinforcing urban decline¹⁷.

Young households and unemployed people are at high risk of both being burgled and of being the victims of violence



Source: British Crime Survey, Home Office; the data is the average for 2006/07 to 2008/09; England & Wales; updated July 2009

Education

Low educational performance is closely linked to low income¹⁸. The quality of schools only accounts for 14 per cent of variation in pupils' performance. Less advantaged children are more likely to be anxious and unconfident about school, to feel a lack of control over their learning and to become disaffected.

Alcohol and drugs

The links between problem drug use, alcohol and poverty are complex, and may involve many factors such as fragile family bonds, psychological problems, low job opportunities and few community resources¹⁹. Although people experiencing poverty, deprivation and inequality are more at risk of developing a drug or alcohol problem, there is no direct connection. Drugs and alcohol are problems facing society as a whole. A report in *The Guardian* in October 2007²⁰ highlighted government figures showing that more than a quarter of adults living in some of the wealthiest towns in the UK were drinking enough alcohol every week to damage their health.

Fuel poverty

- Government figures indicate that between 1996 and 2002, fuel poverty in England fell by 60 per cent from 5.1 million households to 1.4 million households, of which 1.2 million were considered to be vulnerable. In Scotland, in the same period the number fell from 700,000 to 300,000 households and in Wales, fuel-poor households fell from 400,000 to 200,000. But prices started to rise from 2003. By the end of 2006, gas prices had increased by 90 per cent, electricity prices by 64 per cent and the number of households in fuel poverty in Britain rose to over 3 million. Soaring price rises put many low-income or vulnerable consumers at greater risk than ever and made the Government's fuel poverty targets more difficult to achieve²¹.
- In 2007, around 30 per cent of lone pensioners and seven per cent of older couples were fuel poor.
- Figures from 2007 also showed that 1.3 million electricity and 0.9 million gas customers were in debt to their energy supplier.
- Britain has the highest number of avoidable deaths due to winter cold in Western Europe. Fuel poverty can lead to educational under-achievement, social exclusion, and physical and psychological ill health²².

(Since the research for this guide was completed in 2007, energy prices have risen even more dramatically, and it is likely that fuel poverty is affecting even more households. Up-to-date figures can be obtained from Consumer Focus at www.consumerfocus.org.uk/en/Default.aspx?n1=30&n2=406)

Policy on poverty

Decisions that affect poverty are made by many areas of government.

With devolution, this is even more complex as responsibilities are now split between central, devolved and local government. The private and voluntary sectors and others also have a role in finding and implementing solutions.

Among the ways in which poverty is being tackled are:

- ***Getting more people into work.*** This is a key part of the strategy to tackle poverty. The Government wants in particular to ensure that more lone parents and more disabled people are able to work, in order to raise their incomes above the poverty line. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for ‘New Deal’ schemes around the country, aimed at getting people into work, and there are other initiatives run by the devolved administrations and local authorities.
- ***Providing better support services to help people get out of poverty.*** Better childcare and improved public transport can make it more feasible for parents to take up jobs. Many of these services are provided by local authorities.
- ***Improving incomes within work.*** This is principally done through the minimum wage and tax credits, but employers’ practices are crucial in ensuring staff are properly trained, able to progress in their jobs and paid enough to help them avoid poverty.
- ***Improving long-term prospects through education and training.*** Many people argue that the only sustainable solution to poverty is to upgrade the educational qualifications and the skills of the UK population, to support greater productivity and a better-paid workforce. Central and local government, schools and employers would all need to play a part in this, as improving educational achievement for children from disadvantaged backgrounds depends on much more than the standard of education they receive. But people in poverty also need support such as transport costs – just one obstacle that can prevent them taking up opportunities.
- ***Improving the level of benefits for people not working.*** There will always be people who cannot or do not work – for very good reasons – and they may be reliant on out-of-work benefits for many years to come.

Web sources of information

www.poverty.org.uk/index.htm

The Poverty Site – produced by the New Policy Institute and supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation – monitors what is happening to poverty and social exclusion in the UK and complements annual monitoring reports. The material is organised around 100 statistical indicators covering all aspects of the subject, from income and work to health and education. The indicators and graphs can be viewed by age group or by subject. The material covers all parts of the United Kingdom, with specific sections for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. All data is from official sources and is the latest available. All graphs and text are updated whenever new data becomes available.

www.jrf.org.uk/work/poverty

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s work on poverty examines the root causes of poverty, inequality and disadvantage and aims to identify solutions.

www.jrf.org.uk/child-poverty

As its title suggests, this covers the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s work on child poverty. It provides access to a range of publications and working papers which can be downloaded. It also includes a number of case studies.

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai.asp>

The Department for Work and Pensions provides statistics on poverty. This is a direct link to its statistical series on Households Below Average Income and other relevant statistics.

<http://www.eapn.org/code/en/hp.asp>

The European Anti-Poverty Network is a representative network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union. It is supported by the European Commission.

Reporting standards and codes of conduct

The Press Complaints Commission's code of practice

www.pcc.org.uk/cop/practice.html

is the most significant code for journalists. It does not specifically refer to poverty but its first condition on accuracy is clearly relevant:

"1. Accuracy

) The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, including pictures."

and

"iii) The Press, whilst free to be partisan, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact."

Similarly the National Union of Journalists' Code of Conduct

www.nuj.org.uk/innerPagenuj.html?docid=174

requires members to:

"...ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair..." and "... differentiates between fact and opinion..."

Below are details of the organisations which have a direct interest in standards of reporting and broadcasting.

BBC: its Editorial Guidelines are a source of advice to broadcasters on dealing with sensitive issues.

www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/

Chartered Institute of Journalists:

campaigns for press freedom and acts as a trade union for its members in journalism and public relations.

<http://cioj.co.uk>

memberservices@cioj.co.uk

020 7232 2302

Media Trust: harnesses the skills, resources and creativity of the media industry to help voluntary organisations and charities make a difference to people's lives.

www.mediatrust.org

info@mediatrust.org

020 217 3717

Mediawise: a charity concerned with ethical journalism. Provides advice and its own guidelines.

www.mediawise.org.uk

info@mediawise.org.uk

0117 39 9333

National Union of Journalists: encourages its members to work according to its code of conduct.

www.nuj.org.uk

info@nuj.org.uk

020 7278 7916

Office for Communications (Ofcom): regulates all broadcasting in the UK. Broadcasters are required by law to follow its code.

www.ofcom.org.uk

contact@ofcom.org.uk

020 7981 3040

Press Complaints Commission (PCC): all newspapers and magazines voluntarily submit to the PCC's jurisdiction. Its code is written into newspaper journalists' contracts.

www.pcc.org.uk

complaints@pcc.org.uk

020 831 0022

Society of Editors: campaigns for media freedom, self-regulation, the public's right to know and the maintenance of standards in journalism.

www.societyofeditors.co.uk

info@societyofeditors.org

01223 304080

Contacts

The organisations listed below are the most active in tackling poverty in the UK and can provide quotes, information and leads. There are also many universities and research and policy units which specialise in poverty issues and may be able to provide assistance with stories.

Advice NI: works to develop an independent advice sector in Northern Ireland that provides the best possible advice to those who need it most

www.adviceni.net

info@adviceni.net

028 9064 5919

Age Concern: the UK's largest charity, working with and for older people

www.ageconcern.org.uk

info@ace.org.uk

020 8765 7200

Anti Poverty Network Cymru: run by an executive committee of individuals and community organisations, all of whom have experience of poverty at a grassroots level

www.apnc.co.uk

apnc@apnc.co.uk

01685 383929/07789 885720

Asylum Aid: provides advice and legal representation to asylum-seekers and refugees

www.asylumaid.org.uk

info@asylumaid.org.uk

020 7354 9631

ATD Fourth World: an anti-poverty organisation that seeks ways to eradicate extreme poverty

www.atd-uk.org

atd@atd-uk.org

020 7703 3231

Barnardo's: works on projects for vulnerable children and young people

www.barnardos.org.uk

info@barnardos.org.uk

020 8550 8822

BBC Children in Need: gives grants to children's projects throughout the UK

www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey

pudsey@bbc.co.uk

020 8576 7788

The Big Issue Foundation: a registered charity partly funded by sales of *The Big Issue* magazine

www.bigissue.com

info@bigissue.com

020 7526 3200

Capability Scotland: Scotland's leading disability organisation

www.capability-scotland.org.uk

ascsc@capability-scotland.org.uk

0131 313 5510

Centrepoint: helps homeless and socially excluded young people

www.centrepoint.org.uk

info@centrepoint.org

0845 466 3400

Child Poverty Action Group: campaigns for the abolition of child poverty in the UK

www.cpag.org.uk

press@cpag.org.uk

020 7837 7979

Church Action on Poverty: works with UK churches to prioritise the eradication of poverty

www.church-poverty.org.uk

info@church-poverty.org.uk

0161 236 9321

Citizens Advice Bureau: the Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice from 3,300 locations

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

press.office@citizensadvice.org.uk

020 7833 2181

Citizens Advice Scotland: the advice service in Scotland

www.cas.org.uk

info@cas.org.uk

0131 550 1000

Consumer Focus: statutory organisation created by merging energywatch, Postwatch and the National Consumer Council. It offers impartial advice and addresses consumer issues and complaints.

www.consumerfocus.org.uk

contact@consumerfocus.org.uk

020 7799 7900

Credit Action: a national money education charity

www.creditaction.org.uk

office@creditaction.org.uk

0207 380 3390

Daycare Trust: national childcare charity

www.daycaretrust.org.uk

info@daycaretrust.org.uk

020 7840 3350

Disability Action: works to ensure that people in Northern Ireland with disabilities attain their full rights

www.disabilityaction.org

hq@disabilityaction.org

028 9029 7880

Disability Alliance: has the aim of relieving the poverty and improving the living standards of disabled people, and the eventual aim of breaking the link between poverty and disability

www.disabilityalliance.org

office.da@dial.pipex.com

020 7247 8776

Economic and Social Research Council: the UK's leading research funding and training agency addressing economic and social concerns

www.esrc.ac.uk

comms@esrc.ac.uk

01793 413 000

End Child Poverty: an alliance of organisations working to eradicate child poverty in the United Kingdom

www.endchildpoverty.org.uk

info@ecpc.org.uk

020 7278 6541

Energy Action Scotland: a national charity which aims to eliminate fuel poverty

www.eas.org.uk

eas@eas.org.uk

0141 226 3064

European Anti-Poverty Network:

a representative network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union. It is supported by the European Commission.

www.eapn.org
team@eapn.eu
+32.2.226.58.50

4Children: the national charity dedicated to creating opportunities and building futures for all children

www.4children.org.uk
info@4Children.org.uk
0207 512 2112

Groundswell: a UK organisation that promotes self-help initiatives with people who are homeless, excluded or living in poverty

www.groundswell.org.uk
info@groundswell.org.uk
020 7737 5500

Help the Aged: an international charity fighting to free disadvantaged older people from poverty, isolation and neglect

www.helptheaged.org.uk
info@helptheaged.org.uk
020 7278 1114

Homeless Link: the national membership organisation for frontline homelessness agencies in England

www.homeless.org.uk
info@homelesslink.org.uk
020 7960 3010

Institute for Public Policy Research:

think tank that “seeks to promote social justice, democratic participation, and economic and environmental sustainability in government policy”

www.ippr.org.uk
info@ippr.org.uk
020 7470 6100

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: one of the UK’s largest social policy research and development charities

www.jrf.org.uk
info@jrf.org.uk
01904 629241

Low Pay Commission: an independent public body that advises the Government about the National Minimum Wage.

www.lowpay.gov.uk
lpc@lowpay.gov.uk
020 7215 8199

Migrants Resource Centre: works with migrants and refugees to effect social justice and change

www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk
info@migrants.org.uk
020 7834 2505

National Council for Voluntary

Organisations: gives a shared voice to voluntary organisations to help promote their development

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk
ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk
020 7713 6161

Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network:

established in 1991 to create a focus on poverty and social exclusion

www.niapn.org
info@niapn.org
028 9024 4525

One Parent Families/Gingerbread: an organisation for lone parent families

www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk
info@oneparentfamilies.org.uk
020 7428 5400

Oxfam: a worldwide development, relief, and campaigning organisation

www.oxfam.org.uk
media.unit@oxfam.org.uk
01865 472498

The Poverty Alliance (Scotland):

supports people in disadvantaged communities who are working for change

www.povertyalliance.org
admin@povertyalliance.org
0141 353 0440

Save the Children: an independent charity helping children in need

www.savethechildren.org.uk
supporter.care@savethechildren.org.uk
020 7012 6400

Scottish Council for Voluntary

Organisations: the umbrella body for voluntary organisations in Scotland

www.scvo.org.uk
enquiries@scvo.org.uk
0131 556 3882

Shelter: the housing and homelessness charity

www.shelter.org.uk
info@shelter.org.uk
020 7505 2162

UK Coalition Against Poverty: a charity that works with and on behalf of anti-poverty groups across the UK

www.ukcap.org
0151 709 3008

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